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Astrology at the Court of Matthias Corvinus*

Abstract

Though astrology played an essential role at the court of Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary (1458–1490), it has been a largely neglected field of scholarship. This article provides a general overview of the issue, investigates the relations between astronomers /astrologers or humanists, the related primary sources and branches of astrology pursued at the court, and analyses some exemplary horoscopes. The investigation is based on a great variety of sources (including literary and visual artworks): poems for the king, chronicles, various horoscopes and *iudicia*. The most popular branches of astrology seem to be natal and catarchic astrology. Astrology was applied for various purposes: to forecast one's fortune in general, to forecast political and military events, to support institute foundations. Royal patronage and political propaganda played a great role in the importance of this discipline. Even taking into account the popularity of astrology in Europe, the king's personal prediction for the stars seems to have been remarkably strong.

Key words: Matthias Corvinus, János Vitéz, Regiomontanus, Marcin Bylica, history of astrology and astronomy, horoscope, *iudicium*, humanist literature

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“Matthias seemed to do nothing without consulting the stars”¹ – wrote Bonfini, Matthias Corvinus’ historian in his main work, the *Rerum Ungaricarum decades*. Astrology² played an essential role at the court of Matthias I (1458–1490), one of the most renowned Hungarian kings. Despite a great deal of evidence, scholarship “up to now has undervalued the importance of this issue,”³ as András Végh rightly puts it in his recent article. Although some aspects of this court astrology have already been touched on by various scholars, a thorough analysis or even a superficial overview of the topic is still missing from the scholarly literature.⁴ Naturally, the importance

¹ A. Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum decades*, ed. L. Juhász et al., Leipzig 1936–1976 (henceforth: *Decades*) IV, 5, 1: *Matthias... nihil inconsultis unquam sideribus egisse visus est*.

² Henceforth I will use the terms “astronomy” and “astrology” in their modern sense; however, one always has to keep in mind that in the Middle Ages these were just two aspects of the same science: the discipline of the stars and planets, interchangeably called *astronomia* or *astrologia*. For an overview of the problem, see e.g. R. Lemay, *The True Place of Astrology in Medieval Science and Philosophy: Towards a Definition*, [in:] *Astrology, Science and Society: Historical Essays*, ed. P. Curry, Woodbridge 1987. For the medieval astrological terminology, see Ch. Burnett, *Astrology*, [in:] *Medieval Latin: an Introduction and Bibliographical guide*, ed. F.A.C. Mantello, A.G. Rigg, Washington 1996.

³ A. Végh, *Egy reneszánsz felirat töredékei és a budai királyi palota csillagképei* [Fragments of a Renaissance Inscription and the Star Depictions of the Royal Palace of Buda], “Művészettörténeti Értesítő” LIX, 2010/2, p. 218.

⁴ László Szathmáry’s summarizing article, *Az asztrológia, alkémia és misztika Mátyás király udvarában* [Astrology, Alchemy and Mysticism at the Court of Matthias of Hungary], [in:] *Mátyás király emlékkönyv születésének ötszázéves fordulójára*, ed. I. Lukinich, Budapest 1940, pp. 415–452, though informative, lacks any kind of references, so it is not really a scholarly work. Summaries on astronomy in this period (for example Z. Nagy, *Asztronómia a Mátyás-korabeli Magyarországon* [Astronomy in Hungary in the Time of Matthias Corvinus], “Világosság” XVII, 1976, pp. 775–781) focus only on astronomical development pointing towards a modern perception of the world. The importance of astrology at the court has been briefly discussed by Klára Pajorin, *Astrologia, magia e culto di Apuleio nella cultura di Mattia Corvino*, so far available only in Hungarian, in “Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények” 2014/2, pp. 215–225. Most recently, Márton Veszprémy has written about horoscopes related to Matthias Corvinus in a Cracowian Manuscript, touching

of astrology at Matthias' court is not surprising: it was already in fashion at various European courts at that time.⁵ However, it would be worth investigating what kinds of astrology were pursued, in what circumstances and for what reasons; astrology forms an integral part of the intellectual history of the period, and the results of such investigations may contribute to a better understanding of some issues in the areas of political history, art history or literary history. Furthermore, many of the ideas and cases discussed below are also interesting from a more general point of view: they shed light on some contemporary (or not only contemporary) habits of mind. How far the predilection for the stars can determine one's behaviour, for instance, that of the king? The framework of the following study only allows an overview of the issue, with occasional analyses of astrological sources; several minor issues will require further research in the future.

The predilection for astrology at the court

Acquiring a court astronomer / astrologer⁶ was among the first measures taken by the young king. He invited Johannes Gazulo, a famous astronomer from Ragusa, to his court: this is known from the reply letter by the council of Ragusa dated 24 February 1459, in

on some of the more general issues of astrology: *Asztrológia a 15. század második felének Közép-Európájában. A krakkói Jagelló Könyvtár BJ 3225 ms kéziratának magyar vonatkozásai* [Astrology in Central Europe in the second half of the fifteenth century. Hungarian aspects of the Manuscript BJ 3225 of the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow] (MA Thesis, Budapest 2015).

⁵ For a general overview of astrology in medieval Europe, see e.g. S.J. Tester, *A history of western astrology*, Woodbridge [et al.] 1987.

⁶ Henceforth I will use the words "astrologer" / "astrology" or "astronomer" / "astronomy" in accordance with the dominant aspect of the particular scholar's activity, but in fact each of these scholars pursued both astronomy and astrology.

which the royal request was courteously turned down.⁷ The king's idea, and his enthusiasm in general toward astrology – amply attested by later data – may have come first of all from Johannes Vitéz de Zredna (c. 1408–72), the king's tutor, chancellor, the uncle of Janus Pannonius, bishop of Várad (today Oradea), later the archbishop of Esztergom; he had been the central figure in the launch of humanistic culture in Hungary. Vitéz had correspondence with several famous astronomers of that time, like Martin Król from the university of Cracow and Georg Peuerbach from the university of Vienna;⁸ some of Peuerbach's astronomical treatises were commissioned by and dedicated to Vitéz,⁹ among them the *Tabulae Waradienses*, one of the most frequently used astronomical handbooks in Europe up to the seventeenth century. Vitéz himself had a great library in Várad¹⁰ (today Oradea), then in Esztergom, and himself emended several of his books,¹¹ among them an exemplar of Manilius' *Astronomicum*.¹² He seems to have participated actively in the practice of astronomy / astrology: he had, for instance, Peuerbach make a *quadratum geometricum* for him.¹³ His astrological interest is clearly expressed in a passage of Galeotto Marzio: Vitéz was “so keen on astrology that he always carried the ephemerides¹⁴ with him and did not do anything without consulting the stars.”¹⁵

⁷ M.D. Birnbaum, *Renaissance Contacts Between Dubrovnik (Ragusa) and the Kingdom of Hungary*, “Hungarian Studies Review” XIII, 1986, No. 1, p. 37.

⁸ Z. Nagy, *op. cit.*, p. 778.

⁹ *Tabulae Waradienses, Theoricae novae planetarum, Quadratum Geometricum*.

¹⁰ F. Földesi, *Tudósok és könyvek társasága. Vitéz János könyvtára* [The company of scholars and books. The library of János Vitéz], [in:] *Csillag a holló árnyékában*, ed. F. Földesi, Budapest 2008, pp. 88–100.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 95–96.

¹² Ms.: Vat. Palat. Lat. 1711.

¹³ L. Bendeffy, *Regiomontanus und Ungarn*, [in:] *Regiomontanus-Studien*, ed. G. Hamann, Wien 1980, p. 244.

¹⁴ Tables with the planetary positions of a given period.

¹⁵ G. Marzio, *De egregie, sapienter, iocose dictis ac factis regis Mathiae ad ducem Iohannem eius filium liber*, ed. L. Juhász, Leipzig 1934 (henceforth: *De egregie*),

Vitéz had good connections to Cardinal Bessarion, who also had a predilection for the stars;¹⁶ in 1467 Vitéz invited Peurbach's disciple, Regiomontanus (formerly patronized by Bessarion) and other astronomers to the university of Pozsony / Bratislava (*Universitas Istropolitana*) which he had founded. Today, Regiomontanus (Johannes Müller of Königsberg; 1436–1476) is celebrated as a brilliant astronomer of that time, whose activity was pioneering in the reform of the Julian calendar and the transformation of the old Ptolemaic world concept into a Copernican one¹⁷; his calendar¹⁸, ephemerides¹⁹ and other works containing tables with exact astronomical data were later widely used by astronomers and mariners because of the reliability of these works. For contemporaries, the astrological aspect of his activity was more in the foreground. In Vienna, where he studied and later taught, he had good relations with Frederick III, the Holy Roman Emperor (1452–1493); he cast and interpreted in detail a horoscope for Prince Maximilian (1459),²⁰ and he probably made other horoscopes, too, during his Italian stay.²¹ Although he had reservations about predictions, he defended astrology against criticism several times.²² In his Paduan *Oratio* (1464), for instance,

chapter 30: ...*astrologiaequae adeo deditus, ut Ephemerides secum gestitans nihil nisi consultis astris ageret.*

¹⁶ About the role of Bessarion in the foundation of *Universitas Istropolitana*, see also K. Pajorin, *Astrologia...*, pp. 215–216.

¹⁷ See e.g. E. Zinner, *Leben und Wirken des Joh. Müller von Königsberg, genannt Regiomontanus*, Osnabrück 1968; R. Mett, *Regiomontanus. Wegbereiter des neuen Weltbildes*, Stuttgart 1996.

¹⁸ *Calendarium ab anno 1475–1531*, Nürnberg 1474.

¹⁹ *Ephemerides ab anno 1475–1506*, Nürnberg 1474.

²⁰ ÖNB, Cod. Vin. 5179; analysed by H. Grössing, *Die Horoskope eleonores von Portugal und Kaiser Maximilian I*, "Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Geschichte der Mathematik, Naturwissenschaften und Medizin" XXI, 1981.

²¹ H. Grössing, *Regiomontanus und Italien. Zum Problem der Wissenschaftsauffassung des Humanismus*, [in:] *Regiomontanus-Studien*, ed. G. Hamann, Wien 1980, p. 231.

²² H. Grössing, *Humanistische Naturwissenschaft*, Baden-Baden 1983, pp. 123–124.

he claims passionately: “So I call thee the divine spirit of astrology... Without any doubt you are a most faithful herald of the immortal God, providing laws for the interpretation of his secrets.”²³ Little is known about his Hungarian stay, but several pieces of evidence show that, owing to the interests of Matthias and his court, Regiomontanus’ astrological services were of primary importance. His *Tabulae directionum projectionumque*,²⁴ commissioned by Vitéz, propagated a “rational method” in the calculation of the horoscope-houses; *directio* and *projectio* refer to methods of prediction.²⁵ He was soon called from Pozsony to Buda, where he was made “director” of the library, and had to make, among other things, astronomical instruments.²⁶ Matthias seems to have had a predilection for listening to Regiomontanus’ astronomical-astrological argumentation.²⁷ In a letter to Roder, Regiomontanus remembers a curious parley with “my lord the king and the magnates of Hungary,”²⁸ which pictures how interested they were in astrological divination. They complained about a prediction that did not come true, and wanted Regiomontanus to make clear whether the mistake was in the *ars* itself, in its pursuers, or whether it had other sources. Regiomontanus defended astrology,

²³ *Te igitur divinum astrologiae numen appello... Tu es procul dubio fidelissima immortalis Dei nuncia quae secretis suis interpretandis legem praebes...* Oratio Johannis de Montereio, habita Patavij in praelectione Alfragani, [in:] *Johannis Regiomontani Opera Collectanea*, ed. F. Schmeidler, Osnabrück 1972, pp. 51–52.

²⁴ Its first edition, *Ludus Pannoniensis quem alias vocare libuit tabulas directionum*, Nüremberg, without year, is lost; second edition: Venice 1490. Martin Bylica assisted in the completion of the text: D. Hayton, *Martin Bylica at the Court of Matthias Corvinus: Astrology and Politics in Renaissance Hungary*, “Centaurus” 49, 2007, p. 188.

²⁵ H. Grössing, *Humanistische...*, p. 122.

²⁶ L. Bendeffy, *op. cit.*, pp. 247–250.

²⁷ M. Csáky, *Gelehrte am Hofe Corvinus*, [in:] *Regiomontanus-Studien*, ed. G. Hamann, Wien 1980, p. 261.

²⁸ ...*apud Dominum meum regem et proceres Hungariae*. Regiomontanus an Christian Roder (1471), [in:] *Urkunden zur Geschichte der Mathematik im Mittelalter und der Renaissance*, ed. M. Curtze, Leipzig 1902, p. 324.

referring, among others, to the bad transmission of information in manuscripts, and to bad contemporary calculations; he pointed out that more astronomers would be needed at the court.²⁹

Naturally, astrological advice could be medical advice at the same time: once he considered a lunar eclipse as the cause of the king's heart failure, and he advised a special diet.³⁰ His astrological calendar (used for medical purposes, too), published in Nürnberg in 1474, was probably partly written in Hungary.³¹ It was in 1468 that he acquired an exemplar of Firmicus Maternus' *Mathesis*, a standard astrological handbook.³² After Regiomontanus left Hungary in 1471, he dealt more and more with astronomical issues.³³ All these facts suggest the importance of Hungarian patronage as a reason for his many-sided astrological activity.

Contrary to Regiomontanus, Martin Bylica (Marcin Bylica z Olkusza, 1433?–1493), an astrologer of Polish origin, stayed at the royal court even after the death of Matthias. He had studied at Cracow University – the only one in Europe which had its own chair of astronomy-astrology – then taught or worked as an astronomer at the court of Bessarion in Rome, just like Regiomontanus, whom he befriended there. He was also invited to the *Universitas Istrolopoli-*

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 324–5.

³⁰ E. Zinner, *op. cit.*, p. 111. The two main possibilities for the date of the eclipse are 4.08.1468 and 27.01.1469.

³¹ Z. Nagy, *op. cit.*, p. 780. The *Calendarium ab anno 1475–1531* has both tables and texts, the latter dedicated to methods of computing solar and lunar positions, which served as a basis for later additions to the text more clearly of an astrological nature. This later, popular calendar, published several times in the sixteenth century as Regiomontanus' *Cisio*, mainly discussed the effects of the seven planets in certain hours and constellations, applying some simplified kinds of natal and electional astrology, partly for medical purposes. I. Weger, *Regiomontanus és a népnaptárak* [Regiomontanus and the Popular Calendars], Budapest 1937, p. 14.

³² E. Zinner, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

³³ H. Grössing, *Humanistische...*, p. 126.

tana in 1467, where he taught for at least a year.³⁴ From the testimonies of his activity in Hungary, he was a typical court astrologer of his time, who happened to be consulted by Matthias Corvinus. Here he was rivals with another Polish astrologer, Jan Stercze, who had made divinations based on the solar eclipses of 1463 and 1467.³⁵ Bylica strongly criticized the interpretation Stercze gave of the nativity³⁶ of the son of his patron János Rozgonyi. The last phase of this debate took place in the Hungarian diet (!) of 1468, in front of the king and several barons. Bylica won: Stercze was ridiculed.³⁷ This public discourse, which also involved technical details of interpreting horoscopes, shows again most explicitly the king's interest in the stars.

The appearance of a comet on 22 September 1468 gave Bylica the opportunity to write a *iudicium* (prediction) concerning the conflicts of Matthias with George of Poděbrady, the Utraquist king of Bohemia, among other political adversaries of Matthias. The behaviour of the comet, as interpreted by Bylica, predicted events which were favourable to Matthias and unfavourable to his rivals. It was harmful, on the one hand, for George of Poděbrady, Frederick III, and Pope Paul II (the fate of the latter has been investigated with the help of his personal horoscopes) and others, and on the other hand, for the countries ruled by these people. His repeated statement that the comet would “be followed by earthquakes in places ruled by the sign of the Lion”³⁸ must relate to Bohemia, the target of Matthias's campaign, because the lion is both the heraldic animal of the Czech

³⁴ D. Hayton, *Martin Bylica...*, pp. 187–188; L.S. Domonkos, *The Polish Astronomer Martinus Bylica de Ilkusz in Hungary*, “The Polish Review” XIII, 1968, No. 3, pp. 74–75.

³⁵ M. Markowski, *Astronomica et astrologica Cracoviensia ante annum 1550*, Firenze 1990, p. 94.

³⁶ Horoscope of someone's birth.

³⁷ D. Hayton, *Martin Bylica...*, p. 186.

³⁸ *Judicium de cometa que apparavit Anno Domini Mcccc 68*, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm. 9024, fol. 109v.: *cometem nostrum... terre motus sequetur in locis signo leonis suiectis.*

kingdom and sometimes the direct astrological symbol of Bohemia or its king (not because Leo is associated with Matthias).³⁹ The *iudicium* must have, on the one hand, reassured the Hungarian king in his military enterprise against Poděbrady, and, on the other hand, further strengthened Bylica's position as a royal astrologer;⁴⁰ he was rewarded with titles and lands several times for his services.⁴¹ His *iudicium* on the comet of 17 January 1472 was of a similar nature.⁴² Bylica seems to have cast the most horoscopes for the king (about his surviving charts, see more below).

It would go beyond the scope of this study to discuss in depth the role astrology played in the rivalry between Matthias Corvinus and other royal dynasties; some exemplary cases have already been analyzed in the literature, like the abovementioned *iudicia* about the comets, or the case of Matthias and Frederick III. Frederick III was the main enemy of the Hungarian king, and both an epigram of Janus

³⁹ D. Hayton, *Martin Bylica...*, p. 191. In my opinion this is not geographical astrology (according to which certain countries or nations are ruled by different signs), since Leo rules other countries according to Ptolemy, the authority stressed by Bylica himself. Leo could be a symbol of Matthias in general, but in this context it would make no sense: also Hungary would be "destroyed" since ruled by Leo-Matthias. The remaining possibility is the interpretation of Leo as a symbol of Bohemia or its king: (1) the lion is the heraldic animal of Bohemia; (2) the sign Leo may refer to Bohemia: *In cuius signo terre eclipsis evenit homines in illa terra habitantes effectum senciant elipsis, út cum in ariete sencitur effectus elipsis in Polonia minori, hoc ets in terra Cracoviensi, si in thauro sencitur effectus in Polonia maiori, si in leone in Bohemia, si in libra in Austria, si in sagittario in Ungaria...* G. Rosińska, *Scientific Writings and Astrological Tables in Cracow: a Census of Manuscript Sources (15th–16th centuries)*, Wrocław 1984, No. 1657, fol. 104r–108v. *Pro introductione generali eorum...*; (3) the sign Leo may refer to the Czech king: *Sol pulsavit Saturnum ab Ariete ad Libram, quae est astrum regni Bohemiae... Leo significat regem Bohemiae, et Virgo gentem, Venus est domina gentis...* (MS: Bernkastel-Kues, Cus. 208, fol. 85v–101r; A. Krchňák, *Die Herkunft der astronomischen Handschriften und Instrumente des Nikolaus von Kues*, "Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Casanus-Gesellschaft" III, 1963, p. 143).

⁴⁰ D. Hayton, *Martin Bylica...*, pp. 189–192.

⁴¹ L.S. Domonkos, *op. cit.*, pp. 77–78.

⁴² D. Hayton, *Martin Bylica...*, pp. 192–193.

and the *Decades* of Bonfini opposed the allegedly Saturnine character of the emperor to the much more positive Martial character of Matthias. This opposition was supported by astrological evidence, and one of the related sources is the *figura verior*, the “truer” nativity of Frederick III, cast by Bylica and supposed to be more real than the Habsburg version of his nativity.⁴³

Beyond Regiomontanus and Bylica, there are fewer data about the other astrologers who appeared at the court. The German, Johannes Tolhopf,⁴⁴ arrived at Buda in the spring of 1480, and stayed at the court until at least February 1481.⁴⁵ He dedicated to Matthias his *Stellarium*, a book with many tables and beautiful illustrations, “an astronomical work made for the use of astrology.”⁴⁶ Matthias’s second marriage, to Beatrice of Naples in 1476, coincided with the arrival of a new wave of learned men in Hungary, among whom there also must have been astrologers (or physicians applying astrology); Tolhopf, too, arrived in this period. Bonfini attributes the king’s new enthusiasm for the import of Renaissance culture to the influence of Beatrice: Matthias

[...] had the most renowned experts of any discipline sought out and brought here. He liked astronomers, physicians, mathematicians [*mathematici*, which also means astrologer in this period], experts of law; did not have aversion to seers and necromants; did not contempt any discipline.⁴⁷

⁴³ Á. Orbán, *Astrology in Janus Pannonius’s Poems of Praise*, [in:] “Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU” XIX, 2013.

⁴⁴ Also spelled Tolhopff or Dolhopf; his latinized name was Janus Tolophus.

⁴⁵ C. Schöner, *Mathematik und Astronomie an der Universität Ingolstadt im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1994, pp. 172–173.

⁴⁶ E. Zsoldos, *The “Stellarium” of Johannes Tolhopff*, [in:] *Corvina Augusta. Die Handschriften des König Matthias Corvinus in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel*, ed. E. Zsupán et al., Budapest 2014, p. 219.

⁴⁷ *Decades* IV, 7, 87: *Viros quaque arte praestantissimos undique disquisivit, conduitque. Astronomos, Medicos, Mathematicos, iurisque consultos dilexit; ne Magos quidem et Nigromantes abominatus est; nullam artem contempsit unquam.* The English translations in this article are mine.

Besides patrons and their astrologers, others around Matthias also contributed to the relative popularity of astrological ideas in the court. Galeotto Marzio (c. 1424 – c. 1495) studied in Ferrara and Padua, then led a life full of wandering and looking for opportunities to make use of his – otherwise quite dubious⁴⁸ – humanistic knowledge. He found a generous patron in the person of Matthias, who liked his happy, funny character; Galeotto stayed in Hungary several times in the 1460s and 1470s. Astrological ideas can be found in all of his treatises,⁴⁹ in the greatest proportion in his last, main work, *De doctrina promiscua*; these ideas together outline a world concept in which astral determinism is a consistent element. Since he was educated primarily as a physician, his astrological advice pertains primarily to the field of medicine – for example, he dwells on the relation of melancholy and the planet Saturn. Astrology was part of the education of all physicians, yet, Galeotto's views are unique: in his opinion, the stars determined every aspect of life. The first chapter of *De doctrina* provides a good example of the power of the astral spheres: even the name of a newborn is determined by fate and relates to the characteristics of the soul given by the stars; the name of *Aristo-teles* is interpreted as *optimus finis* (“best end”), because he is the one who leads us to uttermost happiness...⁵⁰ The inscription

⁴⁸ Two examples from the secondary literature on the different evaluation of his scholarly merits: “Galeotto is a good example of that type of scholar of the Padovan Aristotelian circle whom the ideal of humanism and the enthusiasm about antiquity touched” (E. Békés, *Galeotto Marzio De doctrina promiscua című művének eszmetörténeti vizsgálata* [An Intellectual Historical Analysis of *De doctrina promiscua* by Galeotto Marzio], PhD Dissertation, University of Szeged, 2011); János Horváth compares him to a charlatan, the type of “omniscient wanderer humanists” who always recommends himself (J. Horváth, *Az irodalmi műveltség megoszlása* [The Separation of Literary Culture], [in:] *Horváth János irodalomtörténeti munkái I.*, Budapest 2005, p. 800).

⁴⁹ E. Békés, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–20.

⁵⁰ *Galeotti Martii Narniensis Liber de doctrina promiscua*, Florence 1548, p. 12.

on the reverse of Galeotto's medal⁵¹ – *Nascentes morimur finisque ab origine pendet* –, a quotation from Manilius' *Astronomicon* (IV, 16), summarizes his astral determinism succinctly.⁵² There is no data on Galeotto's astrological practice at the court; however, with respect to his predilection for astrology and his loquacious character both in his scholarly works and in reality, he probably mentioned and spread such ideas wherever he went. It is known that his knowledge of astrology and ancient astrological works was appreciated at least by János Vitéz, who emended the exemplar of Manilius' *Astronomicon* with the assistance of Galeotto, according to an autograph note of Vitéz as archbishop of Esztergom: „legi et emendavi cum Mgro Galeotto 1469. Jo. Ar. Strg.”⁵³

The above survey of some of the key figures in Matthias' environment might have already given the impression that the main reason of the essential role of astrology at the court was the king's personal interest in this discipline. Let us have a closer look at him: what was his attitude towards the stars, and how often did he turn to them? His predilection is well attested to by the quantity of *corvinas*⁵⁴ containing classical or – to a lesser extent – medieval astrological works. Up to now several such codices have been demonstrated by scholars to have belonged to the *Bibliotheca Corviniana*: for instance, Firmicus Maternus' *Mathesis*, Ptolemy's *Quadripartitum* – translated and commented on by George Trebizond⁵⁵ –, Pseudo-Ptolemy's *Centiloquium*, Albohali's *De iudiciis nativitatum*, some Greek manuscripts

⁵¹ P. Meller, *Mercurius és Hercules találkozása Galeotto emlékérmén* [The Meeting of Mercurius with Hercules on the Medal of Galeotto], Budapest 1955.

⁵² On the reception of Manilius by Galeotto: E. Békés, *op. cit.*, pp. 86–93.

⁵³ Ms.: Rome, BAV, Vat. Palat. Lat. 1711. The codex was described, though insufficiently, by A. Zsák, *Egy ismeretlen Vitéz-kódex* [An unknown Codex of Vitéz], “Magyar Könyvszemle” 1907, 207f.

⁵⁴ Illuminated manuscripts belonging to the *Bibliotheca Corviniana*.

⁵⁵ George Trebizond himself was also keen on astrology: L. Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Sciences*, Vol. III, New York 1934, pp. 395–396.

on astrological instruments.⁵⁶ Naturally, the works of contemporary astronomers could also be found there, mainly works by Regiomontanus.⁵⁷ More importantly, in three different rooms in (or adjacent to⁵⁸) the library one could see painted pictures of the starry sky at a given moment, each accompanied by a distich. The paintings have not survived, but testimony to their existence and the epigrams themselves were recorded by several travellers.⁵⁹ One of the distichs referred to Matthias's birth:

*Aspice Matthiae micuit quo tempore regis
Natalis coelis qualis utroq(ue) fuit*

(Look, what ski[es] shone in both directions at that time when King Matthias was born.)

There exists another recording of this text, but the quoted version seems to be the authentic one.⁶⁰ The second distich pertained to the election of Matthias as king of Bohemia in 1469:

⁵⁶ C. Csapodi, K. Csapodi-Gárdonyi, *Bibliotheca Corviniana* (Budapest 1990), *passim*. There must have been more standard medieval astronomical-astrological handbooks (Bonatti, Sacrobosco etc.) among the books that have not survived. Furthermore, there are some works that do not explicitly belong to this discipline, but are permeated with astrology, e.g. Ficino's *De vita libri tres*.

⁵⁷ At least these works of Regiomontanus: *Tabulae directionum*, *Tabula primi mobilis*, *its commentary*, *Epitome Almagesti*, *De usu astrolabii armillararis*, *Ephemerides astronomicae ab anno 1475–1506*, *De torqueto*, *Defensio Theonis contra Trapezuntium*; furthermore, works by Peurbach, Bylica, Johannes Angeli, Johannes Tolhopf, Torquato etc. could also be found there. J.-P. Boudet, D. Hayton, *Matthias Corvin, János Vitéz et l'horoscope de la foundation de l'Université de Pozsony en 1467*, [in:] *Matthias Corvin, les bibliothèques princières et la genèse de l'état moderne*, ed. J.-F. Maillard, I. Monok, D. Nebbiai, Budapest 2009, p. 208.

⁵⁸ According to Végh, "only the place of the *Cum rex...* inscription can be safely identified as the vaulted place described as the king's library." A. Végh, *Egy reneszánsz...*, p. 216.

⁵⁹ A. Végh, *Egy reneszánsz...*, pp. 213–7.

⁶⁰ The quoted version was recorded by S. Schweigger, *Ein neue Reyssbeschreibung auss Teutschland nach Constantinopel und Jerusalem*, Nürnberg 1608, pp. 21–2.

*Cum Rex Matthias suscepit scepra Boemae
Gentis, erat similis lucida forma poli.*

(When King Matthias gained kingship over the Bohemian nation, the bright sight of the sky was similar to this one.)

The third distich referred to the coronation of Vladislaus II. András Végh has recently investigated the context of these paintings, clearing up many misunderstandings in previous scholarship; two of his conclusions are important here. The relevant words of Bonfini – *celum universum suspicere licet* – probably do not relate to any observatory, but to these paintings, which looked down from the hemisphere-shaped vaulted ceiling. They were not horoscopes,⁶¹ but images of the sky at the moment when the event mentioned in the

The syntax of the text, mirrored by the English translation, becomes clear if one puts the words in this order: “Aspice, qualis [orbis] caelis utroque micuit, quo tempore natalis regis Matthiae fuit.” The other version of the text comes from Franciscus Omichius (*Beschreibung einer Legation und Reise...*, Güstrow 1582): *Aspice Matthiae micuit quo tempore regis / Natalis, coeli qualis imago fuit*. In this version the meaning of the second clause is clear, but *micuit* in the first clause does not have a meaningful subject. On the other hand, one cannot understand it with the same syntax as in the first case (that is, *qualis coeli imago* would stand for *qualis*), because *qualis imago fuit* cannot be just separated and reclassified by *qualis imago micuit*, the freedom of word order has its limits even in humanistic Latin poetry. So, Omichius’ sentence seems to be either grammatically incorrect or to break the rules of Latin poetry. (One of the reasons why Omichius changed the text might have been that he did not understand the full distich that he saw.) If this conclusion is correct, and Schweigger’s version is the authentic one, this has further consequences: *utroque* means “in both directions”, which may imply that somehow two parts of the stellar globe were represented, for example the northern and southern hemispheres, or the visible and invisible (below the horizon) skies. This possibility would fit Matthias’s horoscope, which shows that practically all the planets were below the horizon, therefore, if only the sky visible at the moment of birth had been represented, the planets so important for Matthias would have been missing from the painting. This whole problem requires further investigation.

⁶¹ Painted horoscopes were mentioned for example by J. Bollók, *Asztrális misztika és asztrológia Janus Pannonius költészetében* [Astral Mysticism and Astrology in the Poetry of Janus Pannonius], Budapest 2003, p. 54.

epigram happened, with figurative constellations, probably similar to those of Bylica's globe (now kept in Cracow).⁶² They primarily fulfilled a representative function (just as the library itself): they suggested that the birth or the election of Matthias happened in accordance with the will of heavens.⁶³

Some foreign poets indeed celebrated the birth of Matthias as favored by the stars. This occurred with other European patrons as well in the second half of the fifteenth century,⁶⁴ unsurprisingly. On the one hand, humanist poetry had always had the habit of eulogizing the patron, while on the other, astrology was in fashion, and if either the poet or his patron liked astrology, the poet had the opportunity to versify the fortunate birth in this fashion. Such panegyrics were addressed to Matthias, too. Besides the poems with only superficial astrological topoi,⁶⁵ there is at least one poem, the *Laudes bellicae* by Alessandro Cortesi,⁶⁶ which directly refers to the planetary positions found in the king's nativity:

⁶² A. Végh, *Egy reneszánsz...*, p. 222. On the globe of Bylica: Z. Ameisenowa, *The Globe of Martin Bylica of Olkusz and celestial maps in the East and in the West*, transl. A. Potocki, Wrocław 1959.

⁶³ This kind of representation came to fashion in Italy by those whose origin was more humble – as in case of Matthias – than that of the members of ancient royal dynasties. A. Végh, *Egy reneszánsz...*, p. 220.

⁶⁴ For example, Janus Pannonius wrote poems with this motif: *Carmen ad Ludovicum Gonzagam*, lines 139–140, 207–218.

Iani Pannonii Poemata quae uspiam reperiri potuerunt omnia, ed. S. Teleki, A. Kovásznai, Traiecti ad Rhenum, Bartholomeus Wild, 1784. See my study *Astrology* (as n. 43), p. 115–120.

⁶⁵ For example Tito Vespasiano Strozzi's epigram *pro Matthia rege Ongariae*, v. 3–4: *Laeta novum mundo natura faventibus astris / Addidit, in lucem te veniente, decus*, [in:] *Analecta nova ad historiam renascentium in Hungaria litterarum spectantia*, ed. J. Ábel, I. Hegedűs, Budapest 1903 (henceforth: AN), p. 191.

⁶⁶ In the *Laudes bellicae*, written in 1487–8, Cortesi eulogized the military, “Martial” merits of Matthias (K. Pajorin, *Humanista irodalmi művek Mátyás király dicsőítésére* [Humanistic literary works eulogizing Matthias Corvinus], [in:] *Mátyás és a humanizmus*, ed. E. Csukovits, Budapest 2008, p. 652).

*Quanta tibi placidi favet indulgentia coeli!
Qualibus aegoceros radiis, que lumine Mavors
Prospicit, et quanto rutilus Iove fulgurat aether!*⁶⁷

(How favored you are by the grace of the serene sky! With what rays Capricorn, with what light Mars looks at you, and how brilliantly the glowing ether shines forth with Jupiter!)

Aegoceros is the general poetical expression for Capricorn, ascendant sign during Matthias's nativity. Mars as the god / planet of war was often associated with Matthias; here Mars is represented as a planet in a favorable position at his birth, so this may relate to the king's nativity where Mars ruled the important tenth house (the house of *mores*, character). These references do not necessarily mean that Cortesi knew the king's nativity itself (Fig. 1); information on the most important or most emphasized elements of the nativity may have been widely available the time.

The king's knowledge about the stars is often mentioned in texts originating either from his court or from abroad. In most cases – as in the case of Ransovius,⁶⁸ Simon de Phares,⁶⁹ Eustachius,⁷⁰ Galeotto's

⁶⁷ A. Cortesi, *Laudes Bellicae Matthiae Corvini Hungariae regis*, lines 198–200, [in:] *Olaszországi XV. századbéli íróknak Mátyás királyt dicsőítő művei* [Fifteenth-century Italian Literary Works Eulogizing Matthias Corvinus], ed. J. Ábel, Budapest 1890 (henceforth: *Olaszországi*), p. 307.

⁶⁸ Heinrich Ransovius, the sixteenth-century Danish astronomer, wrote in *Catalogus imperatorum...: Matthias Corvinus... propagator et admirator omnium doctrinarum fuit et delectatus est maxime historiarum cognitione, didicit etiam studiose multa de stellarum motibus et effectionibus*. Cited by A. Végh, *Egy reneszánsz...*, p. 228, note 62.

⁶⁹ Simon de Phares in his collection of the most famous astrologers (*Le Recueil des plus celebres astrologues*) speaks about Matthias as an “astrologer ruler”: “Mathias, roy de Hongrie, fut aussi souverain astrologien...”. Cited by J.-P. Boudet, D. Hayton, *Matthias...*, p. 205.

⁷⁰ He wrote in his iudicium for Matthias for the year 1486: *Huiusmodi scientiae [astronomia] te oblectari et omni virtutis genere te esse praeditum nemo ignoret*. In AN (as n. 65), p. 104.

*De egregie...*⁷¹ – the statements are so short and general that they do not reveal what kind of knowledge or interest Matthias had concerning the stars. The more detailed references stress the astrological aspect, though some of these are still topical in nature. It is worth quoting a longer passage by the Florentine Naldo Naldi, which shows an astrological purpose behind the astronomical studies of Matthias:

*Mente quidem celsa quam sit domus ampla deorum
Hunc didicisse iuvat; Leo quid sibi quaerat in altis
Sedibus et quicquid Virgo sibi poscit honoris,
Tunc ubi Mercurius coniungitur ordine pulchro
Saturnoque gravi levis ille Iovique benigno
Quid ferat alma Venus, pulcherrima sola dearum
Laetitia, quid luna frequens, quid sol et amicus
Afferat ipse boni; quid et adversarius idem
Ipse mali tribuat nobis; quid triste minetur
Mars, dum bella gerit, dum saevus et arma ministrat,
Corvinus sapiens excelsa in mente repostum
Sic tenet, ut nihil hunc possit latuisse, quod instat...*⁷²

(It delighted him to study, with his mind high in the spheres, how rich the gods' house [the sky] is; what honor [domicile] the Lion claims in his high position, and what honor the Virgin asks for; when the light Mercury conjoins in an orderly fashion with the heavy Saturn and the benign Jupiter; what [fortune] the beautiful Venus, the only goddess of happiness, brings, and what the hastening Moon; what good the Sun brings unto us as a friendly planet, and what bad as an inimical planet; what the baleful Mars threatens with, when he makes war and fiercely takes up arms; all this was stored in the excellent mind of the wise Corvinus so that nothing in the near future could remain hidden before him...)

⁷¹ *De egregie*, chapter 10: *Tenebat praeterea astrologiam et in operibus Apulei Platonici ita detritus, ut eius dogma omnino calleret, unde et apud eum theologi, philosophi, medici, poetae et oratores et astrologi et qui omnes disciplinas profitebantur, frequenter errant.*

⁷² N. Naldi, *De Laudibus Augustae Bibliothecae libri quatuor ad Matthiam Corvinum Pannoniae Regem Serenissimum*, v. 105–118, [in:] Olaszországi (as n. 67), p. 273.

The versified *Oratio* of Thebaldius also eulogizes Matthias's expertise in astrological matters, in addition, he explains some of the consequences of his behaviour: he could cancel and postpone his planned actions if the stars threatened him with bad fortune:

*Annua non Phoebi, non te via menstrua Lunae
Praeterit: in cunctis coelestia sidera rebus
Observas. Ideo facili tibi prospera cursu
Omnia succedunt: nam si tibi saeva minantur
Astra, pedem retrahis melioraque tempora semper
Exspectas. Sed qui confisi viribus audent
Omnia, nec coeli motus cognoscere curant,
Dispereunt; neque enim terrena potentia magna est
Usque adeo, ut superis valeat contendere stellis.⁷³*

(The annual way of Phoebus and the monthly way of the Moon do not escape your attention: in everything you take into account the heavenly stars. So your life is easy, you prosper and succeed in everything: for if the cruel stars hang over you threatening, you stop moving and wait for more favorable times. But those who, confident in their own power, dare anything, and do not care to know the heavenly movements, will perish; for no earthly power is great enough to match the stars in the sky.)

In his *De incognitis vulgo*, Galeotto dedicates a whole paragraph to the king's enthusiasm for and expertise in astrology, praising him as *rex et astrologus*, and claiming that he "reached such a perfection" in this discipline "that he predicts with full veracity either rainy or good weather, the condition of the crops, favorable hours to choose, and the genitures of men."⁷⁴

Such topoi of astronomical-astrological expertise can also be found in panegyric texts addressed to other European rulers or

⁷³ A. Thebaldius, *Oratio ad Matthiam invictissimum Pannoniae regem*, v. 88–98; cited by J. Huszti, *Janus Pannonius asztrológiai álláspontja* [Janus Pannonius' attitude toward astrology], "Minerva" VI, 1927, p. 43, note 1.

⁷⁴ *Eo autem perfectionis devenit, ut et pluvias et serenitatem et annonae conditionem horasque electiores et hominum genituras summa cum veritate praevideat*. In: Olaszországi (as n. 67), p. 255.

patrons.⁷⁵ If all these words of flattery and poetry were the only evidence of Matthias's astrological interest, one would not need to take them too seriously; but other, historically more valid narrative and horoscopic sources can now be discussed below. All these sources complement each other and point toward the same, so far quite neglected, characteristic of the Hungarian king and his court.

Bonfini had a different attitude to the king's predilection for the stars than Galeotto. Bonfini's skepticism can be detected all throughout the *Decades*, mostly in the passage where he compares Matthias and Frederick III and considers this "vain superstition of astronomers and astrologers" as the king's only weakness, the only characteristic he had in common with Frederick III.⁷⁶ Matthias, cautioned by an astrologer, tended to take unfavorable planetary positions seriously. "Enthusiasm" is not the best expression to describe Matthias's attitude toward the stars. If the stories quoted below are true, Matthias was – at least in some periods of his life – dependent on the stars, which had the power to impede him in many of his activities, and even make him fearful. Bonfini reports that, Matthias, staying in Buda in 1489, wanted to convoke the diet and make peace with Frederick III, but had to postpone these plans continuously because of his illness. When at Christmas "he got even worse horoscopes, which he was dependent upon, he sent the carts forward and hastened to Vienna as if threatened by death."⁷⁷ In the German chronicle of Peter Eschenloer, a town clerk from Breslau (today Wrocław), a funny story has been preserved which illustrates to what extent astrology could function as a magical belief compared to common sense.

⁷⁵ See, e.g., for the "harmonization" of the activity with the favorable or unfavorable stars, Vadian's epigram to Laurentius Sauer, in Tannstetters *Judicium* for 1513 (Nürnberg 1512; VD 16, T 163).

⁷⁶ *Decades* IV, 4, 112: *Par utriusque religio, par quoque superstitio astronomorum, mathematicarumque vanitatum...*

⁷⁷ *Decades* IV, 8, 175: [...] *captato deteriore horoscopo, cui nimis erat obnoxius, praemissis curribus utpote cuitato mortis periculo, Viennam contendit.*

Matthias... arrived in the village of Grebilwitz next to the town of Breslau [Wrocław] on the Thursday before the day of Trinity [25 May 1469], before noon, and he could have entered Breslau on the same day at dinner-time, [but] he refused to do this, for the sake of an astrologer [*Sternseher*] whom he had by himself and who did not allow him to enter on that Thursday. The councillors were surprised and sent him some wine, fish and beer from the council in order to pay homage to him, and he received all this with pleasure, spent there a happy day with his nobles, and said to the Breslauers that they should go to the city around noon. This camping gave opportunity to great rumors to arise in Moravia, Hungary and Austria, narrating how the Breslauers did not want to let Matthias in, so that he had to stay in front of the city.⁷⁸

Astrological documents and methods of prediction

In order to clarify what kind of astrology the court pursued, contemporary astrological documents themselves have to be investigated. In this respect, testimonies of *practice* – documents of concrete cases which contain technical data and sometimes interpretations – are more telling than theoretical treatises and handbooks. The sheer quantity of surviving documents suggests that Matthias' court belonged to the centers of contemporary court astrology.⁷⁹ Besides the

⁷⁸ “Mathias... quome am donirstag vor Trinitatis [25. Mai 1469] bey die stat Breslow in das dorff Grebilwicz vor mittagis vnd hette denselben tage wol zu Breslow mogen einkomen vff die vesperzeit, das er nicht tun wolde vmb eyns sternsehers willen den er bey jm hatte der jm is denselben donirstag nicht wolt gestatten. Die ratmanne vorwunderten sich vnd santen aws dem rate mit wein, fische, bire zu seinen gnaden erende, das er allis frölich vffnome vnd hatte do einen frölichen tage mit seinen herren vnd sagte den Breslernn, frw vff mittag in die stat zu czihen. Aws disem leger entstunt vil rede bis in Merhern, bis in Vngernn, Osterreich, wie die Bresler Mathias nicht hetten wellen einlossen, hette vor der stat müssen bleiben.” P. Eschenloer, *Geschichte der Stadt Breslau*, ed. G. Roth, Münster 2003, p. 761.

⁷⁹ The quantity and types of surviving astrological sources are comparable to those produced in the Habsburg court of Friedrich III or Maximilian I, one of the most renowned centers of European astrology. See e.g. Hayton's soon-to-appear

two *iudicia* of Bylica⁸⁰ mentioned above, the Bolognese Eustachius Candidus sent Matthias a *iudicium* for the year 1486;⁸¹ An important Cracovian codex⁸² contains a series of horoscopes: for Matthias's birth, his coronation as king of Hungary, his ceremonial sword-cut,⁸³ the launching of the war against Frederick III, the birth of Frederick III (the above-mentioned *figura verior*, with a few interpretative sentences), the coronation of Fredrick III, the birth of Beatrice, the arrival of the Hungarians in Pannonia (!), the birth of János Corvin. In other codices, one can find János Corvin's horoscope of conception,⁸⁴ or a solar return for the forty-second birthday of Matthias (1485).⁸⁵ A group of horoscopes related to Matthias forms part of a larger collection in a Vatican codex once owned by Christine, queen of Sweden.⁸⁶ It also has Matthias's nativity, for the same date, and the horoscope of his coronation as king of Hungary, for a different date;⁸⁷ in addition, it has the horoscope of his election as Hungar-

monograph: *Astrology and Politics in the Holy Roman Empire*. I thank Darin Hayton for putting his draft at my disposal.

⁸⁰ *Judicium de cometa que apparavit Anno Domini Mcccc 68*, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm. 9024, fols. 107r–13v.; *Judicium de comete qui apparavit Anno Domini M° cccc° lxxij°* Melk, Stiftsbibliothek Cod. Mellicensis 751/2, fols. 319r–25r.

⁸¹ *Eustachii Candidi Bononiensis canonici Regularis Judicium*, [in:] AN (as n. 64), p. 104.

⁸² *Nativitates*, Cracow, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, cod. 3225.

⁸³ A ritual that forms part of the coronation ceremony of the Hungarian kings: the king has to ascend a “hill” and cut with his sword in the direction of the four quarters.

⁸⁴ Cracow, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, cod. 2858, fol. 1v.

⁸⁵ Cracow, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, cod. 1840, 297.

⁸⁶ Rome, BAV, cod. Vat. lat. 1208; shortly discussed by J. Huszti, *Magyar királyok horoszkójai egy vatikáni kódexben* [Horoscopes of Hungarian Kings in a Vatican codex], “Magyar Könyvszemle” XXXV, 1928, pp. 1–10.

⁸⁷ Within the long date only one number is different: in the Vatican codex 18 March stands for 28 March in the Cracovian, and the latter seems to be the historically valid one, since “28 March 20 hours” means 29 March 8 hours in the modern dating system, and 29 March is the accepted date of Matthias's coronation. The 18 March version might be simply the result of a slip of the compiler's pen.

ian king in 1458. Matthias's electoral horoscope and a horoscope of the conquest of Pannonia can also be found in a collection of a Jena Manuscript.⁸⁸ The only horoscopes that have interpretations are those for János Corvin's birth and twelfth birthday in a third Cracovian codex.⁸⁹ The horoscope for the opening of *Universitas Istropolitana* (5 June 1467) was added to the last page of a corvina, an exemplar of Ptolemy's *Almagest*.⁹⁰ The horoscopes in the Cracovian codices were most probably cast (and interpreted) by Bylica, who gave his astronomical-astrological belongings to the university of Cracow in his will.⁹¹

The documents can be of both natal and catarchic⁹² astrology.⁹³ Casting and interpreting nativities has always been the basic and most popular branch of astrology, and this seems to have been the case in Matthias's court as well. It is not by chance that in the Cracovian horoscope collection the nativity of Matthias is the only one that was analyzed in depth, including tables of aspects⁹⁴ and notes on the calculations, and there are several people whose only horoscopes seem to have been their birth horoscopes.⁹⁵ Nativities could also serve as the bases of comparison while interpreting the actual position of stellar and planetary bodies; for instance, the horoscopes

⁸⁸ Thüringer Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Jena Ms. El. f. 73. M. Veszprémy, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁸⁹ Cracow, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, cod. 2858; the two horoscopes were described by J. Csontos, *Corvin János két horoscopja Krakkóban* [János Corvin's two horoscopes in Cracow], "Magyar Könyvszemle" 1880, pp. 382–387.

⁹⁰ *Figura coeli hora institutionis Universitatis Histropolitanae*, ÖNB, cod. lat. 24, 212r.

⁹¹ D. Hayton, *Martin Bylica...*, p. 193.

⁹² The astrological method by which an important action of the near future is adjusted to a date that has especially favorable planetary positions.

⁹³ There are no traces of horary astrology (*interrogationes, horaria*) in the sources (the pursuer of this kind of astrology raises a question and looks for the answer in the horoscope cast for the exact time of the question).

⁹⁴ Angular distances between the planets in a horoscope (opposition, trine etc.).

⁹⁵ E.g. Beatrice, or the son of János Rozgonyi; see above.

cast for János Corvin's twelfth and fifteenth birthdays (these birthday-horoscopes were also called "solar returns") were compared to his nativity in the interpretation.⁹⁶

A number of documents suggest the practice of catarchic astrology. It often occurred in European courts that the ruler did not leave the time of an important event (coronation, start of a campaign etc.) to chance, and that his court astrologers had a say in the matter of choosing the date. The related documents produced in Matthias' court suggest that the Hungarian king fit into this pattern. However, one should always keep in mind the possibility that the horoscope in question may have been rectified, that is, the propitious date may have been chosen after the event,⁹⁷ especially when these horoscopes are conspicuously favorable. In the following discussion, I will survey the main types of catarchic astrology that seem to have been pursued at the court, while taking a closer look at two especially important documents.

One group of these sources relates to Matthias becoming a king: the moments of his election, coronation, and sword-cut are recorded in horoscopes, while his election as Czech king was "illustrated" in the painting of the Corvinian Library. It is not certain at all that these are all electional horoscopes,⁹⁸ but at least the horoscope of Matthias' coronation (29 March 1464) is highly likely to be electional. It is conspicuously fortunate (Fig. 2 and 3); although no interpretation

⁹⁶ J. Csontos, *op. cit.*, pp. 382–387. Another example: Bylica cast the nativity of Pope Paul II and involved it in his interpretation of the comet of 1468 in order to boost the ill fate of the pope (D. Hayton, *Martin Bylica...*, p. 191).

⁹⁷ Rectification: the specification of the *exact* date of an event by astrologers. For example, it is usually not recorded on the level of minutes and seconds when an event happened, but the astrologers tend to look for minutes and seconds which yield planetary positions that are as favourable as possible. A telling case of rectification is discussed by M. Quinlan-McGrath, *The Foundation Horoscope(s) for St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, 1506: Choosing a Time, Changing the Storia*, "Isis" 92, 2001, No. 4, pp. 716–741.

⁹⁸ M. Veszprémy, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

belongs to it, the application of contemporary standard rules of interpretation yields interesting results.

There is a tight triple conjunction of Saturn (Matthias' "birth ruler"), Jupiter (*fortuna maior*, in Pisces,⁹⁹ in dominion!) and Venus (*fortuna minor*), all in the tenth house, which has the most to do with the glory of a coronation (this is the house of honor, career, character etc.). The point of fortune (*pars fortunae*) also falls in the tenth house. All this would be fortunate enough, but in addition the conjunction is the summit of a sextil-sextil-trine triangle (all of these are favorable aspects), the trine being between the Moon and Mercury. Though the Moon and Mars are in detriment, Venus and the Sun (most important for kings) are in exaltation. Matthias must have been happy with such a coronation date. There can only be two reasons for such a fortunate horoscope: it was cast in advance in order to secure a propitious date for the coronation, and / or it was rectified. In order to answer this question, scholarship should find out the exact date of the coronation (the time of day indicated in the chart, 8:40 AM according to modern time, is only one piece of data), and a comparative study of surviving coronation horoscopes of European rulers would also be needed. (The planetary data of the horoscope for the given date were quite well calculated by the astrologer.¹⁰⁰)

Another application of electional astrology is military usage: looking for the right date to start a campaign, a siege or a battle. Although only one relevant document has survived (the horoscope for beginning the war against Frederick III), Bonfini records this habit of Matthias several times. On the one hand, the historian formulates it as a general habit of his: "As for starting a new campaign, it is dubious whether he was cautious or audacious, though he never undertook

⁹⁹ Pisces was important in Matthias' nativity, too: the Sun was in Pisces (see Fig. 1.)

¹⁰⁰ Checked by ZET 8 Lite. As for the planets, the difference between given and real planetary positions do not exceed 1°; among the house cusps, only the fourth, fifth, tenth and eleventh houses deviate significantly from the exact (computer-calculated) house data.

anything without consulting the horoscope.”¹⁰¹ On the other hand, he mentions concrete cases: Matthias consulted the stars before setting out from Buda for the campaign in 1477;¹⁰² then before the siege of Vienna (1485),¹⁰³ before a siege of Vienna New Town (1488);¹⁰⁴ and before marching into that city after the successful siege.¹⁰⁵ The military astrological aspect is even more ignored by scholarship than the previous aspects: a thorough analysis, taking into account references to astrology, the known dates of military events and European parallels for military forecasting,¹⁰⁶ might yield interesting results.

¹⁰¹ *Decades* IV, 8, 276: *In obeundis expeditionibus dubium an cautior, an audetior; quamvis nihil inconsulto adoriretur horoscopo.*

¹⁰² *Decades* IV, 5, 1: [...] *priusquam castra moveat, astra consulit, ac expeditionis captat auspicia; nihil inconsultis unquam sideribus egisse visus est; divina hinc voluntatem, faustamque horam elicere nitebatur. Ut coepta quaeque gravissima bene succederent, nihil unquam nisi consultis patribus, legibusve, et astronomis, adoriri placuit, ne vi ac temere quicquam auderet...*

¹⁰³ *Decades* IV, 6, 254: *Praesidium, quod in continente supererat, locatis subinde castris, XVI. Kal. Aprilis facta deditio recipitur, et eo quidem die, quo sic insignis fuit solis eclipsis, ut stellae multae inspectae fuerint. Multi quoque illum solis defectum Caesari infaustum fore praedicarunt. Nec ab re quidem: quando eo anno, qui octogesimus quintus ultra quadringentesimum et millesimum numerabatur, Viennam Austriae metropolim cum maxima patrimonii iactura Imperator amisit. Cum igitur ab huius anni principio, haud inconsultis sideribus et auspiciis, rex Viennam obsidere coeperit, quo infesta Friderico astra esse noverat: huc animum universum intendit, ut indomitam hactenus Pannoni civitatem, praeterea florentissimam et opulentissimam, aut vi, aut inedia domitet.*

¹⁰⁴ *Decades* IV, 8, 1: *Matthias consultis mathematicis et astronomis, Idibus Ianuarii ad expugnandam Neapoli Austriam, superiori anno iam obsessam, contendit.*

¹⁰⁵ *Decades* IV, 8, 79: *Tertio die expectata siderum dexteritate, Matthias ovans sub umbella, magnifica pompa, et praecedentibus cunctis sacerdotum magistratuumque ordinibus, urbem ingressus est.*

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, the duke mentioned in Carmody’s handbook (H.M. Carey, *Judicial astrology in theory and practice in later medieval Europe*, “Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences” XLI, 2010, p. 95) or the Margrave of Küstrin who was so devoted to this kind of astrology that he did not move a single mile away from the encampment if he was told it was an unlucky day (C. Brosseder, *The writing in the Wittenberg Sky: Astrology in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, “Journal of the History of Ideas” LXVI, 2005, pp. 557–576).

The horoscope that records the opening of the *Universitas Istitopolitana* (Fig. 4) is a valuable document, being reportedly the first surviving medieval European example of the relatively rare genre of “foundation” horoscopes.¹⁰⁷ Since it has already been analyzed in detail by Boudet and Hayton, here I only summarize their argument and add a few remarks. They conclude that the horoscope is professional from an astronomical point of view (the position data are sufficiently correct), but not so from an astrological point of view.¹⁰⁸ It is “not favorable and elaborate enough”¹⁰⁹ to be an electional horoscope for such an important event for János Vitéz and Matthias, and that it may be a retrospective document serving the purpose of reinforcing the king’s faith in the success of the university. The visible traces of interpretation, like the sole sentence about Mercury (“whoever has Mercury in the twelfth [house], will be a great wise man and a great philosopher”¹¹⁰) or Sirius highlighted in the chart itself, suggest an interpreter other than Regiomontanus or Bylica; a second-rank astrologer like Jan Stercze might have done it.¹¹¹ Indeed, the horoscope displays some strange elements that are unlikely to have come from an astrologer like Regiomontanus. For instance, it is forced that Sirius (the brightest star of *Canis Maior*) was put to the Ascendant, to Leo 11°: Sirius has another position in the *Liber Hermetis de 15 stellis* (which was probably used by the astrologer¹¹²) and in the handbooks of the major classical astrological authorities.¹¹³ It is indeed question-

¹⁰⁷ H.M. Carey, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

¹⁰⁸ J.-P. Boudet, D. Hayton, *Matthias...*, p. 209.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 211.

¹¹⁰ *Cicumque Mercurius fuerit in duodecima, erit magnus sapiens magnusque philosophus*. According to the contemporary meaning of the word, *philosophia* included all the *artes*.

¹¹¹ J.-P. Boudet, D. Hayton, *Matthias...*, p. 210.

¹¹² *Ibidem*.

¹¹³ Sirius’ position in the *Liber Hermetis de 15 stellis*: Cancer 14°; in Ptolemy’s *Almagest*: Gemini 17°; in Firmicus Maternus’ *Mathesis*: Leo 1°; in Manilius’ *Astronomicum*: Leo (degree not specified).

able that this was an electional horoscope, yet, regarding this possibility, I am a bit less sceptical than Boudet and Hayton. They, too, argue that the horoscope is rather favorable than unfavorable,¹¹⁴ and the consideration of the aspects seems to reinforce this statement. The favorable aspects are dominant: there is an exact sextil between Jupiter and the Moon / Ascendent, a sextil between Jupiter and Saturn, and a trine between Saturn and the Moon / Ascendent; these form a sextil-sextil-trine triangle, that occur in other horoscopes, too (see e.g. Matthias' coronation horoscope above), and it is the Ascendant, the most important component of a horoscope, that receives these beneficent rays.

Not surprisingly, the few examples of interpretation found in the documents, which all have the royal family as their addressee, share the common characteristic of partiality in favor of the patron. "King of kings, you will be victorious and fortunate in the war, you will have great dominion in consequence of the death of the emperor because of the conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn and Mars in the first [degree] of Capricorn,"¹¹⁵ predicts Eustachius Candidus; Bylica's comets are harmful for practically all enemies of Matthias;¹¹⁶ Frederick III's military failures are shown by his "truer" nativity;¹¹⁷ nearly all the planets at János Corvin's birth were in a position advantageous for him.¹¹⁸ Rectification could also help make the interpretations favorable: at least the data on minutes and seconds, present in every horoscope, are rarely historically correct. The purpose of currying favor

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 209–211.

¹¹⁵ *Tu rex regum in bello victor eris et fortunatus, dominium magnum habebis propter mortem imperatoris ob coniunctionem Iovis Saturni et Martis in prima Capricorni*. In: AN (as n. 65), p. 104. (He uses the term *coniunctio* not in the ordinary sense: in January 1486 only Jupiter and Mars were in conjunction, the involvement of Saturn must be due to its rulership over the sign Capricorn and so over Jupiter and Mars.)

¹¹⁶ D. Hayton, *Martin Bylica...*, pp. 191–193.

¹¹⁷ D. Hayton, pp. 193–194.

¹¹⁸ See the interpretation of his nativity in: J. Csontos, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

is also clear if one considers which solar return was chosen to cast a particular horoscope on. Jupiter, traditionally the *fortuna maior* among the planets, in the first house of Corvin's geniture, close to the ascendant, in Sagittarius (his own sign), was to yield great fortune for him; it was twelve years later that Jupiter, having made its circle around the Sun, reached the same degree of Sagittarius, and this must be one of the reasons why the astrologer cast a horoscope exactly on the twelfth birthday, no sooner and no later. Statements about events unfavorable for the royal family, if any, usually take the form of warnings instead of predictions of inevitable future events.

Other European rulers also had their astrologers, but even compared to these, Matthias' belief and reliance on horoscopes and predictions seems to have been remarkably strong. His patronage – and, to a letter extant, that of Vitéz – resulted in a multi-faceted usage of astrological ideas, which also appeared in literary works and visual artworks, and were involved in political propaganda. The king preferred the complex, seemingly scientific astrological methods (horoscopes or *judicia* applying horoscope elements). At least two types of astrology, natal and electional, were often practiced. Astrology was applied for various purposes: to forecast one's fortune in general, to forecast political and military events, to support institute foundations. Ultimately, the significant role of astrology at Matthias' court should be emphasized even more than scholarship has done so far.

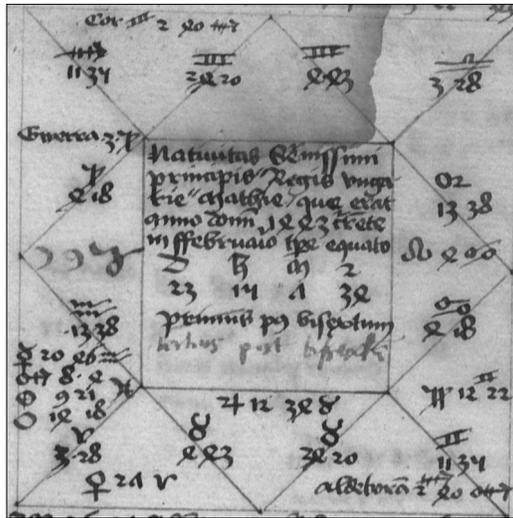


Fig. 1. Matthias' nativity horoscope (Cracow, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, cod. 3225)

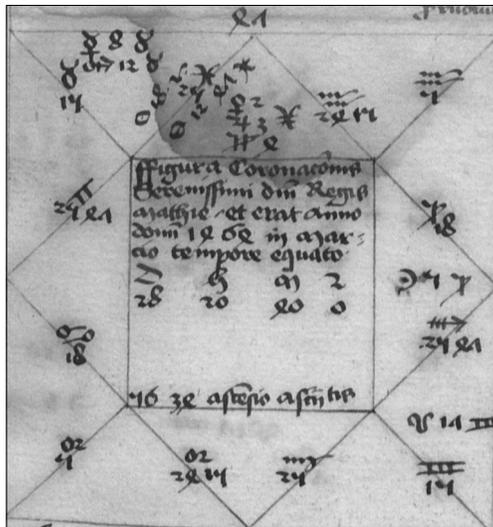


Fig. 2. Matthias' coronation horoscope (Cracow, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, cod. 3225)

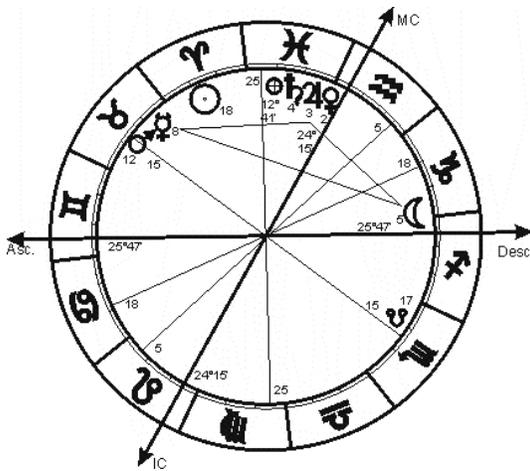


Fig. 3. Matthias' coronation horoscope in modern form

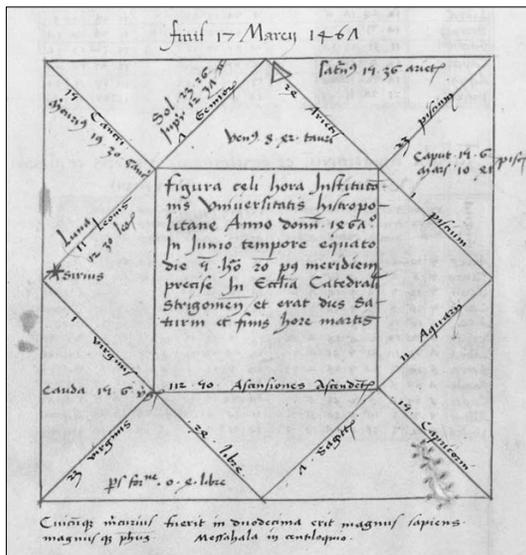


Fig. 4. The foundation horoscope of the *Universitas Istropolitana* (Vienna, ÖNB, cod. lat. 24, fol. 212v)

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